

VZCZCXRO4516
RR RUEHNZ
DE RUEHWL #0323/01 2740358
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 300358Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5455
INFO RUEHNZ/AMCONSUL AUCKLAND 1749
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 5270
RUEHDN/AMCONSUL SYDNEY 0725
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0722
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0106
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0207

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 WELLINGTON 000323

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR STATE FOR EAP/ANP AND OES
PACOM FOR J01E/J2/J233/J5/SJFHQ

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EFIS](#) [SENV](#) [NZ](#)
SUBJECT: NZ-AUSTRALIA WHALING VENTURE UNVEILED

11. (U) Summary. On September 10, the governments of New Zealand and Australia announced a joint venture to undertake non-lethal scientific research of whales in the South Oceans to better manage whale numbers in the region. Although both governments avoided characterising the proposed research program as a means to confront Japan's whaling research program, Greenpeace New Zealand would like it to be used in this way. Both governments will now work toward developing the research program and building support within the ICW, with the expectation that it will begin in late 2009-10. End Summary.

Joint New Whale Conservation Initiative Unveiled

12. (U) On September 10, New Zealand Conservation Minister Steve Chadwick and Australian Environment Minister Peter Garrett announced in Auckland a joint New Zealand-Australia initiative to develop a non-lethal whale research in the Southern Ocean. Garrett stated that the aim of the initiative is to increase the global commitment to non-lethal research to better manage the recovery of whales. He cited the dramatic reduction in whale numbers in the South Ocean region, particularly the South Pacific Humpback, as justification for non-lethal research. Chadwick stated that the new initiative in the Southern Ocean would build on the innovative and collaborative approach Australia and New Zealand have always brought to this area. Both governments predict the initiative will expand its membership to other nations active in or neighbouring the Southern Ocean.

Part of a Larger Plan to Reform the ICW

13. (SBU) The initiative is led by Australia, which proposed the creation of a world-wide collection of research partnerships, such as the Southern Ocean initiative, in advance of the June 23-27, 2008 International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting in Chile. The proposal was widely welcomed at that meeting, which included delegates from the United Kingdom and hosts, Chile. New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFAT) Policy Officer Finnian Cheshire of the Environment Division told post that The GNZ has not yet received any explicit statements of support for the proposal from IWC-member governments. However, he expressed confidence that broad support will be forthcoming once governments further study the proposal. The creation of world-wide research partnerships forms part of a larger New Zealand and

Australia plan to modernise the IWC and make it into a 21st Century conservation-focused organisation.

Confronting Japan Not the Goal

14. (SBU) Both ministers were careful in public remarks to avoid mentioning Japan and its controversial scientific whaling policy. MFAT's Cheshire stressed that the proposed initiative should be seen exclusively as a genuine program of non-lethal research rather than a means to directly confront Japan. However, Greenpeace New Zealand Executive Director Bunny McDiarmid hopes that the initiative will openly challenge the legitimacy of Japan's whale research program. McDiarmid hoped that the program will be a serious challenge to Japan's supposedly scientific program that kills whales while offering little scientific value for the past 20 years and asserted that scientific study of whales on the South Ocean could be gathered without killing whales. The Japanese Government has not commented on the proposed non-lethal research program.

Economic Upside

15. (U) Chadwick believes that there is a significant economic upside for the region in developing non-lethal scientific whale research. She claimed that because the proposed science is reliable and would

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support sustainable management of whales, the whale-watching industry in Australia, New Zealand and other Pacific Island countries would benefit enormously.

Next Steps

16. (SBU) Chadwick and Garrett announced that both their governments would continue to work together to reform the management of science in the IWC and develop internationally-agreed, cooperative conservation management plans for whales. Garrett stated that Australia plans to host an international gathering of whale scientists in February 2009 to draft a five-year research plan for whales in the Southern Ocean. He anticipated that this plan will be reviewed by the IWC Scientific Committee and finalised in June 2009, with the research program expected to begin in late 2009-10. MFAT's Cheshire said the initiative is still a work in progress and that the New Zealand Government is now engaged in a process of determining the how best to further contribute to the South Oceans initiative and whether its jurisdiction should be expanded to include the Ross Sea.

Keegan